



STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
**KRISTEN DEXTER**

WISCONSIN STATE ASSEMBLY

68TH DISTRICT

## **Testimony from Representative Kristen Dexter March 9, 2010**

Committee on Education  
In support of AB 807

Chairwoman Pope-Roberts, Committee members, thank you for convening today to hold this hearing on Assembly Bill 807 relating to transportation aid to school districts.

Currently the state funds about 7% of school district transportation costs. Some districts, especially rural districts, spend a disproportionate amount of their budget on transportation and this means fewer dollars being spent in the classroom. Over the past few years ridership has decreased and resulted in unused funds in the transportation aid appropriation. The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) lapses funds from this appropriation back into the general fund at the end of each year. This bill would allow DPI to proportionately increase transportation aid rates to school districts if there is money left over.

Under this bill, beginning in the 2010-11 fiscal year, if there is a balance in the appropriation after DPI pays all approved claims, DPI must distribute the balance to school districts on a prorated basis.

There are over 290 school districts currently transporting pupils over 12 miles. While this money would go to all districts, it would greatly help those with large geographic areas. Some of the districts have just a few students, some have hundreds, but it costs the same to drive a bus carrying 10 students as one carrying 50. We have heard Representative Clark talk about the districts affected by consolidation and the growing number of students that need to be transported greater and greater distances. This extended transportation comes at a tremendous cost to the district.

This bill would not provide a windfall to any one district. However, like the other legislation I have introduced and as I have heard over and over; every little bit helps. This money was designated for transportation aid and this bill will keep it there.

Again, I would like to thank the committee for convening this hearing. I hope that we can work together to pass Assembly Bill 807.

**Assembly Committee on Education  
March 9, 2010**

**Department of Public Instruction  
Testimony on Assembly Bill 807**

Thank you to Chairperson Pope-Roberts and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify before you today in support of Assembly Bill 807 (AB 807). My name is Dave Carlson and I am the Director of the School Financial Services Team at the Department.

AB 807 would allow the department to distribute any remaining balance in the transportation aid appropriation to school districts after approved claims have been paid.

Under current law, school districts are required to provide transportation services to public and private school pupils enrolled in regular education programs if the pupil resides more than two miles from the nearest public school they are entitled to attend. State pupil transportation categorical aid is based on a flat annual amount per transported pupil. Payments are based upon the distance a pupil travels to school from home.

<i>Mileage</i>	<i>Current Rate</i>
0-2 miles (hazardous)	\$15
2-5 miles	\$35
5-8 miles	\$55
8-12 miles	\$110
Over 12 miles	\$220

For the 2009-10 school year 420 of the 425 school districts received state aid for transporting 531,200 students. Just over 40,000 of those students were private school students. \$24.1 million were distributed to school districts for approved transportation aid claims out of the \$26, 337,300 appropriation.

It is estimated that the total school district transportation costs for transporting pupils to and from school is around \$280 million. Therefore, we estimate that state pupil transportation aid reimburses only nine to ten percent of actual transportation costs.

In recent years the department has been unable to spend the entire transportation aid appropriation due to the cap on per pupil rates, despite the fact that these rates represent a small percentage of district transportation costs. The department feels AB 807 would help address the budgetary pressures school districts face in covering the remainder of these costs.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



# School Administrators Alliance

*Representing the Interests of Wisconsin School Children*

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**TO:** Assembly Committee on Education  
**FROM:** John Forester, Director of Government Relations  
**DATE:** March 9, 2010  
**RE:** Assembly Bill 807 – School Transportation Aid

The School Administrators Alliance (SAA) strongly supports Assembly Bill 807, relating to transportation aid to school districts.

Under current law, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) must prorate state aid payments to school districts for transportation costs if the amount appropriated is insufficient to cover all eligible costs. Under AB 807, beginning in the 2010-11 fiscal year, if there is a balance in the appropriation after all claims have been paid, DPI must distribute the balance to school districts on a prorated basis.

In this environment of rising transportation costs, the current annual state appropriation of \$26,337,300 represents less than 7 percent of school district transportation costs statewide (currently over \$400 million annually). But, because of declining bus ridership and a fixed reimbursement formula, the school transportation appropriation is projected to lapse more than \$2 million to the general fund in 2009-10.

The current aid and reimbursement levels have a disproportionately negative impact on rural school districts (geographically large, sparsely populated). Rural districts may spend more than \$1,000 per student in annual transportation costs, while some urban and suburban districts spend less than \$100 per student. For years, rural districts have had to reduce their instructional budgets in order to pay for the transportation services required by state law.

At a time when school districts are cutting teaching staff and instructional programming in order to balance school budgets, it seems to me the least we could do is give DPI the authority to fully expend the school transportation aid appropriation.

We urge your support of AB 807. If you should have any questions regarding the SAA's support for AB 807, please call me at (608) 242-1370.

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